

The Other Side of the Story

In the darkness of the bar, it was tough to make out the form of the man in the back booth. After studying him through the haze and smoke for several minutes, young Rengor Vanth decided that it was time to begin the interview. He checked his Sector 242 NewsLine ID and cautiously approached.

Before he had taken two steps, the hunter named Malis turned to stare at the reporter. Rengor fought the nervousness he felt building in his stomach. The hunter watched dispassionately as Rengor slowly approached. The reporter smiled weakly. "Hunter Malis, is it?"

The hunter looked away, not a trace of emotion crossing his scarred face. "Sit down. Order a drink -- it'll calm your nerves."

Rengor eased into the booth, trying to ignore the large bloodstain on the table. He punched in an order for a mug of lum. He noticed Malis sizing him up. The hunter had a cold face, with steel gray eyes and a determined stare: the look of a killer. Suddenly, this "choice" assignment seemed like a bad idea.

Malis sneered, "Never met a hunter before, have you?"

Rengor tried to put on an air of bravado, and failed miserably. "No ... not until now. Shall we begin the interview?" Rengor pulled his small holo-recorder from his work pouch, and powered it up.

"Audio only, no vid. It's bad for business."

"It's your interview."

The robotender hovered over to the table, depositing the mug of lum in front of Rengor. The cost was an exorbitant 15 credits. Rengor paid it without complaint.

"Interview with hunter Malis. Are you ready?"

Malis simply nodded while taking a long draught from his steaming mug. Rengor began.

"Hunter Malis, in the past few years you've become a notable hunter. Your reputation has steadily grown. In fact, you've become something of a celebrity, even beyond hunter circles. Yet, virtually nothing is known of your background or your motives. People want to know who you are and why you became a hunter. What led you to this profession?"

Malis smiled. Rengor found it chilling.

"It was a long time ago, kid. And a personal matter. Suffice it to say that I found my own reasons to stalk criminals. They've earned what happens to them. Death is too good for most of them."

Rengor looked down at his datapad, trying to find an acceptable way to phrase his next question. "Hunter Malis, bounty hunting is a ... *controversial* field. To be honest, a lot of people are uncomfortable with how you and your colleagues earn their living ... killing for credits. How do you justify your actions?"

Malis let out a slow breath.

"It's a civilized profession for an uncivilized galaxy. Simple. I take care of the people everyone else is afraid of."

He pulled a blaster carbine from his holster. Rengor wondered if Malis would shoot him right there. After a few seconds, Malis put the weapon on the table. "Kid, I just scared the life out of you. But I want you to know something. If I was going to tag you, you'd know it. I'm a hunter, not a murderer. And I don't have to justify what I do, or how I do it, to anyone. I do what I do because someone has to do it ... and I'm good at it. I'm a bounty hunter -- to you, that equates to killer.

"But I'm the man who may be stopping that criminal, who, if he isn't stopped, might end up killing you or someone you care about. I'm someone who keeps order and this galaxy desperately needs it. My acquisitions -- that's what we call the vermin we hunt -- are people who have earned a death sentence. My last acquisition was a little gravel-maggot named Yerlad. I'll admit I went a little rough on him, but those scars will always remind him of me. He fears me now, and fears my kind. That's good, because fear is the only way to keep those animals in line. He killed five people: five men who put their lives on the line for the Empire. He claimed to be fighting for the Rebel Alliance, and I'm sure the widows really appreciate that."

Rengor apprehensively asked his next question. "So you're saying that the ends justify the means?"

"Of course. The Empire is trying to maintain order, to protect the galaxy from itself. Without the Empire, there would be anarchy. Do you want a return to what it was liked during the Republic? Alderaan was a perfect example. That planet and its revolutionaries were a threat to the stability of the Empire and the galaxy. They earned what they got. Now, look at what that so-called Alliance endorses. An armed revolution. Have you given any thought to what that means? If they get their way, millions will die in the fighting -- all for a "noble" cause that will be forgotten as soon as they get a taste of power. Look at their biggest hero, that kid from the Outer Rim. He *murdered* over a million men. Those men had families and children. That's the kind of scum I hunt. And if that's not good enough for you and the spineless drones you entertain, they can try to stop me."

Rengor was beginning to feel ill. This was going to be a long day ...

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